Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
Editor: Michael P. Birks, 36 Trevor Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 5QH. England. 0161 747 5924.

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The Central American Group is a part of the Spanish Main Philatelic Society, the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is *The Mainsheet*, published quarterly, and is free with your subscription. The Secretary is Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 01733 2687078. The subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US$ should be made payable to "The Spanish Main". A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining during the course of the year the appropriate part subscriptions should be added - Feb-Apr £6/$15; May-Aug £4/$10; Sep-Nov £2/$5 to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect.

The Central American Group caters for the collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £8/$15 resident in the UK or in Europe, or £11/$19 elsewhere. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining after June 1st, add 50% to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect. Cheques in sterling payable to "The CA Group" should be sent to the treasurer, David Hankey, 2 Prince's Drive, Marple, Stockport SK6 6NJ, England. Phone 0161-449 0693. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group for overseas members.

We regret we cannot accept dollar cheques for subscriptions because each cheque costs a minimum of £5/$8 to negotiate.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$2 each, although Volumes 1 and 2 are sold out. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$2 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable. Payments must be made in sterling or in dollar bills.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4PL, England. Phone 01883 742186.

The group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russell Court, St Lukes Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7AP, England. Phone 01628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion from them.

The auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested to do so.

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Vol.IV, No. 80 **<mpbirks@36trevor.freeserve.co.uk>** **July 2000**

EDITORIAL

When we started this Newsletter back in September 1980 I really did not expect it to last very long since it is always difficult to get collectors to respond – unless of course they can write and tell you that you are wrong!

I was therefore quite surprised when we reached issue 20 after 5 years, amazed when we reached issue 40, staggered at issue 60 and at issue 80, 20 years later, hopeful we can reach 100. As anticipated it has got more difficult as time has gone by and the number of contributors has decreased. Nevertheless there does seem to be a demand for the Central American Newsletter and whilst that demand is present I will do my best to meet it.

You will be pleased to see that this issue is accompanied by an index of all issues to date. There is no need to write and thank me.

We send our congratulations to Neal West, President of the Nicaraguan Study Group, for a Platinum for his one frame exhibit of H&G B82 envelopes (the yellow ones with the 2c Leon Cathedral stamp, which he wants to buy from everyone) at Napex, in Washington, and also to Derek Pocock who got a silver for his airmails at the same show. I had the pleasure of being there with them at the Awards Banquet to receive the disapproving glances from other tables as we cheered the Nicaraguan Study Group members who got awards. Someone suggested we had been drinking – well really!

There was no Nicaragua at London 2000 and very little other Latin America. The dealers who I spoke to had a successful show and the quality of the exhibits was outstanding. There have been the usual grumblings about poor awards which I think are justified on this occasion. Whilst several South American exhibits received good awards I am struggling to find a Central American one that did. The nearest is a Gold and a Large Vermeil for Mexico and a Large Vermeil for Costa Rica.

I realise that the benefit of Earl's Court is its proximity to the City and its Tube station but the venue was shabby and poorly lit. Alexandra Palace (London 1990) may be out of the city centre but the venue was superb, those from outside could drive in and park and there were plenty of buses for the locals and visitors. Of course this may have something to do with the fact that the organisers rejected my display! Never mind, it went to Napex where it was appreciated by the NSG members and it got a Gold (but more to the point I was made to feel very welcome by the organisers and had a terrific time).

See you in Volume V!

mpb

Dates for your diary Stampex (National), 20-24 September 2000.

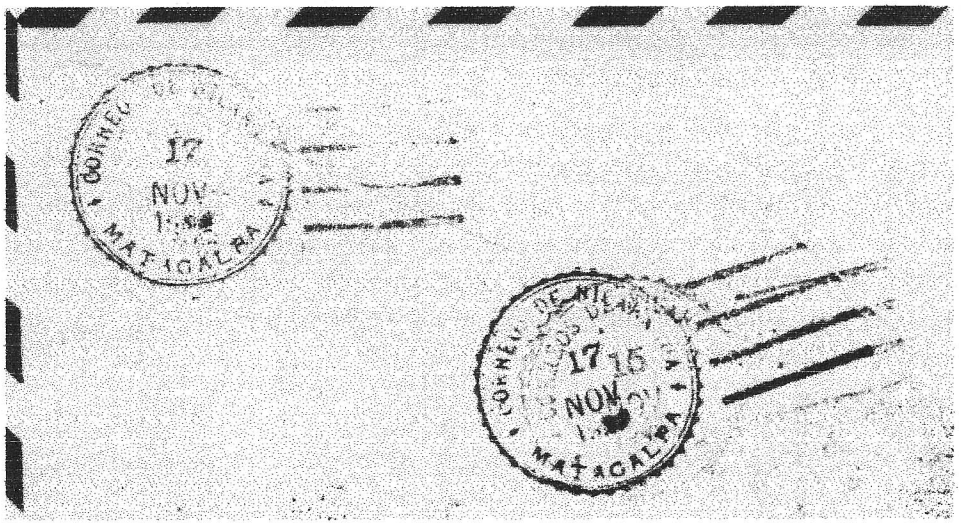
Glasgow 2000 (National), 17-19 November 2000.

NICARAGUA: THE FIRST INTERIOR AIR MAIL FLIGHTS
(Part 2)

by Dr NEAL WEST
(President of the *Nicaragua Study Group* of the United States)

Huber states that the "12 October" first flight covers to Matagalpa have 15 November 1932 arrival marks. I have examined eight covers to Matagalpa; the only official one examined has a 17 November arrival mark (figure 5, Part 1), another cover (a "Hammer") has both one strike dated 15 November and two strikes dated 17 November of the arrival marks (figure 6), four (not illustrated but also registered ("Hammer" covers) have one each 15 and 17 November arrival marks whilst two hand-addressed covers from "Unknown" have no arrival marks (one of the two is illustrated as figure 7).

Figure 6: Registered first flight cover from Managua to Matagalpa.
Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 circular air mail registration and rectangular Managua air mail cancellations. Franked with SG 693, 617 and 467. Reverse: Circular 15 November 1932 and (2 x) 17 November 1932 Matagalpa arrival marks (below).



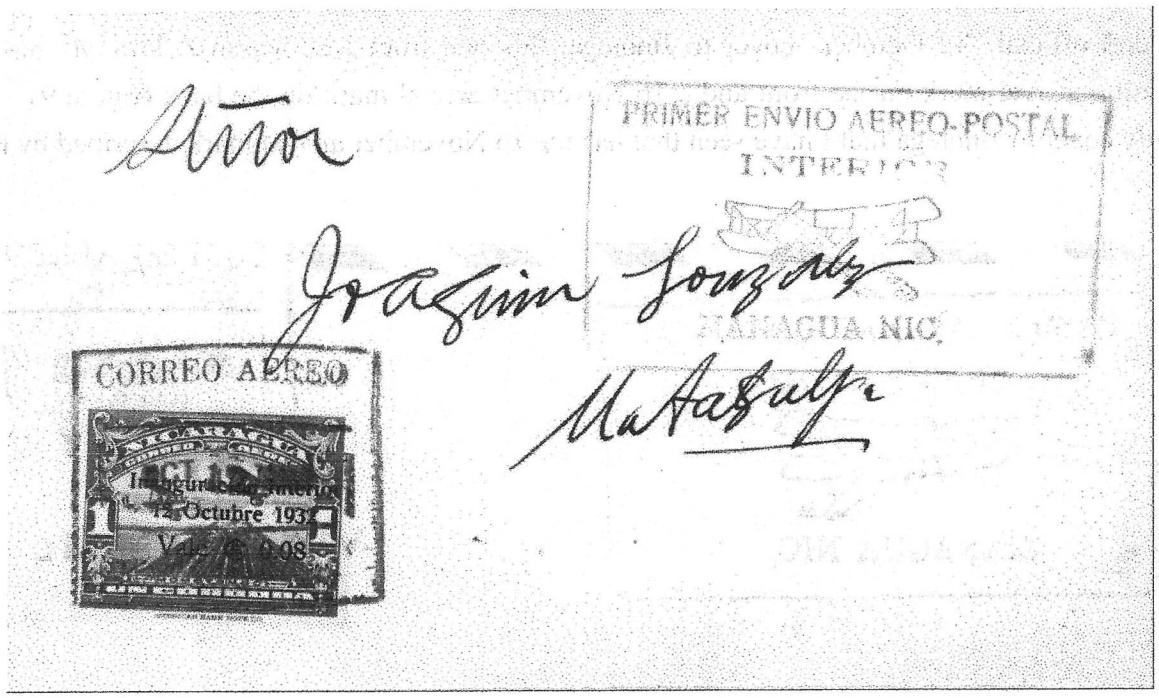


Figure 7. First flight cover from "Unknown" in Managua to Matagalpa.
Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 rectangular Managua air mail cancellation.
Franked with SG 693. Reverse: (not shown) Blank.

The fifteen "12 October" first flight covers to Jinotega that I have examined feature an interesting range of dates on the arrival stamps. The official cover from Rafael Gonzalez (figure 8) has an 18 November Matagalpa arrival mark and that is on the front of the cover.

Figure 8. Official first flight cover from Managua to Jinotega.
Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 rectangular Managua air mail cancellation.
Circular 18 November 1932 Jinotega arrival mark on the front. Franked with SG O689. Reverse: (not shown) Blank.

A second official "12 October" cover to Jinotega, this one from José Marín Zelaya M., has an 18 November arrival mark on the front and a 16 November arrival mark on the back (figure 9). This is the only cover to Jinotega that I have seen that has the 16 November arrival mark described by Huber.

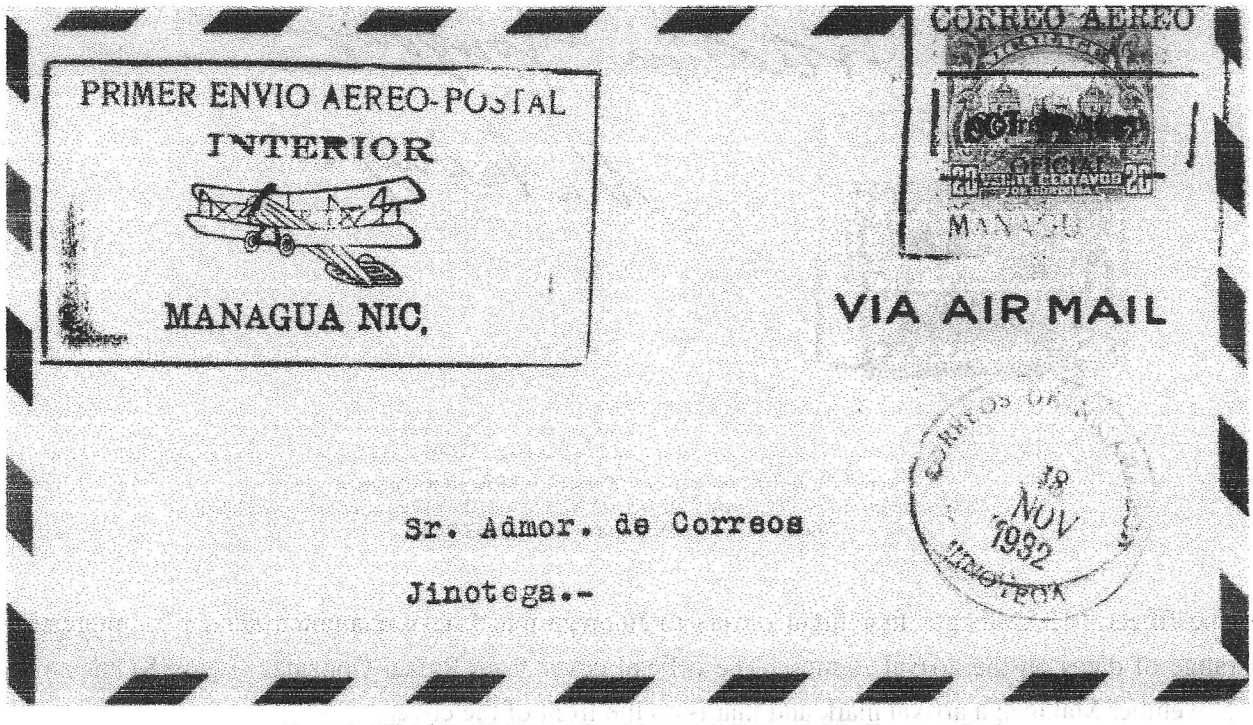
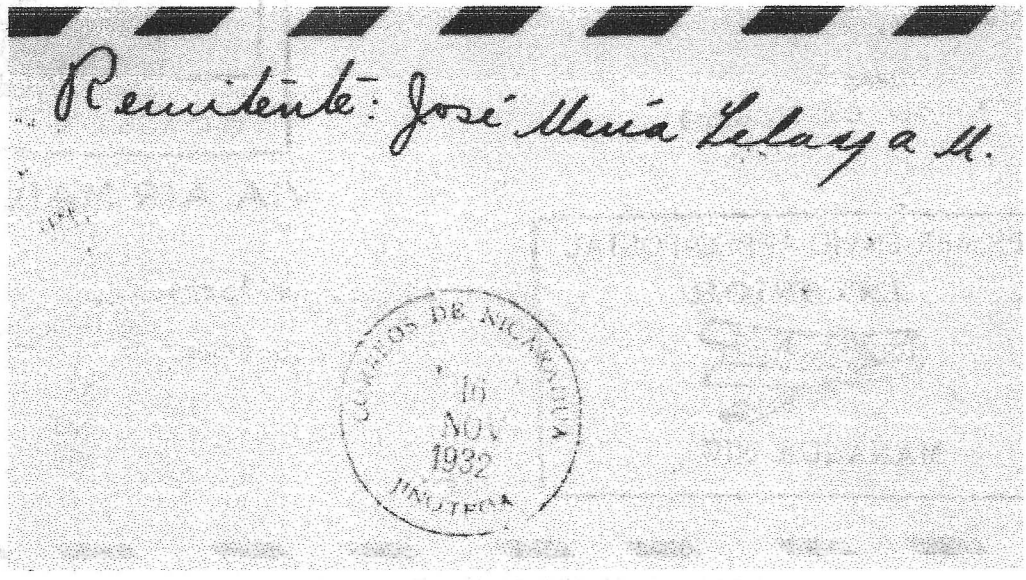


Figure 9. Official first flight cover from Managua to Jinotega. [Kay Rasmussen]
Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 rectangular Managua air mail cancellation. Circular 18 November 1932 Jinotega arrival mark on the front. Franked with SG O689.
Reverse: Circular 16 November Jinotega arrival mark (below).



However the eleven "Hammer" covers to Jinotega I have seen are all registered and all have a 25 November arrival mark (Figure 10). The final two examples that I have of "12 October" first flight covers to Jinotega, from "Unknown", have no arrival or registration marks.

Figure 10. Registered first flight "Hammer" cover from Managua to Jinotega. Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 circular air mail registered and rectangular Managua air mail cancellations. Franked with SG 693, 617 and 467. Reverse: (Not shown) 12 October 1932 circular registration air mail cancellation and circular 25 November 1932 Jinotega arrival mark.

The cover illustrated in figure 11 from "Unknown" to a person in Jinotega is very similar to the two covers from "Unknown" to two other people in Matagalpa mentioned previously. These four covers from "Unknown" might be suspected of being forgeries since they have no arrival marks and since the first flight handstamp used legitimately by the postal authorities in 1932 was confiscated 20 years later from the home of the Nicaraguan stamp dealer who was subsequently convicted of philatelic fraud (see "Nicaragua: the End of a Fraud" by Richard N Cone in *Aero Philatelist Annals,* October 1953, pp.39-59).

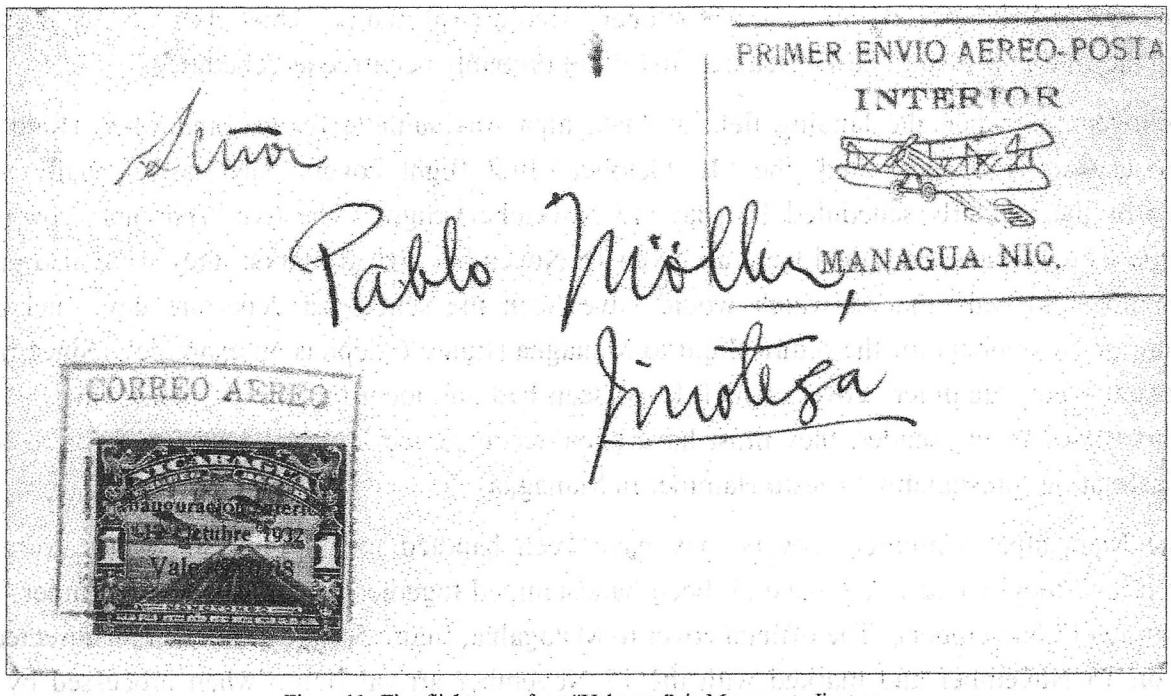


Figure 11. First flight cover from "Unknown" in Managua to Jinotega.
Front: Violet rectangular first flight cachet. 12 October 1932 rectangular Managua air mail cancellation
Franked with SG 693. Reverse: (Not shown) Blank.

One argument for the authenticity of these four covers is that the Managua datestamp on the "Unknown" covers to Matagalpa and Jinotega have a subtle feature seen on all other "12 October" first flight covers that I have examined so far. The "OCT" of the date stamp insert slants up to the right, and the 12 is slightly sunken (the covers depicted in figures 3 and 10 most clearly show these date stamp characteristics).

A second argument against the "Unknown" covers being forgeries is that they have none of the features described by Richard N Cone in his article about the various counterfeits of the covers bearing SG 693 with fake 12 October 1932 cancellations ("Nicaragua Inaugural Inland Airmail, 1932" in *Aero Philatelic News*, 1 April 1951, pp.26-27).

Based on the cumulative evidence which emerged during my examination of the images of the thirty-nine covers from the first inland air mail service, the following interpretation is presented: Covers destined for the first flight which were on hand in Managua addressed to all four destinations were cacheted and cancelled "CORREO AEREO / OCT 12 1932 / MANAGUA Nic-". I agree with Huber that the first flight to Ocotal and Esteli probably occurred on Tuesday 18 October 1932. Huber states that the interior air mail service was scheduled to occur twice weekly (on Tuesdays and Fridays) from Managua to Ocotal, Esteli, Matagalpa and Jinotega and was planned to have return service from these four cities on Mondays and Thursdays. If the airline was making good faith efforts to maintain this schedule in spite of weather conditions, the Tuesday 18 October flight to Ocotal and Esteli finally occurred on the announced schedule day. The fact that Ocotal arrival marks were dated 12 October and Esteli arrival marks were dated 18 October was probably due to separate decisions made at the two destinations. In Ocotal, the post office maintained the fiction of a 12 October 1932 first flight, while in Esteli, the actual flight date (18 October) was probably applied with arrival stamp. There is additional evidence that the actual air mail service to Esteli was successfully established during these weeks. I have in my first day cover collection eighteen covers originating in Managua and franked with various combinations of the SG 694-707; Scott C32-46 series. All of these were cancelled on 24 October 1932 in Managua and all have 25 October Esteli arrival marks. Thus, the Tuesday flight to Esteli on the week following the 18 October first flight probably occurred as scheduled.

In mid-November, when the landing field at Matagalpa was suitable for use and when Honduran revolutionary activities permitted, the "12 October" first flight covers may have actually been delivered by the regularly scheduled Tuesday (15 November) flight. The five "Hammer" covers to Matagalpa which I have examined were all given 15 November arrival marks: they were also given 17 November "arrival" marks, which would have been the scheduled departure day and date (Thursday 17 November) for the return flight to Managua (figure 6 depicts an example). Since none of the twenty-five "Hammer" covers which I had seen had any identification on them which would direct them back to the sender, they must have been accompanied by some instructions as to their return destination (presumably Ernesto Hammer in Managua).

Thus the Matagalpa "Hammer" covers may have been handled in a group, since they were all registered, and they would likely have all been handstamped together on arrival (15 November) and on departure (17 November). The official cover to Matagalpa, figure 5, may have been misdirected or missed on 15 November and marked with the 17 November arrival stamp when processed by the Matagalpa authorities for the 17 November return flight to José Marín Zelaya M., in Managua.

The "12 October" first flight covers to Jinotega may not have all arrived there on the same day. The two official covers illustrated as figures 8 and 9 both have Jinotega arrival marks dated 18 November (a scheduled Friday flight from Managua) on the fronts of the covers. These two covers are the only "12 October" first flight covers that I have seen with arrival marks on the front.

The cover to Jinotega shown in figure 9 also has a 16 November arrival mark on the reverse. This is the same date that Huber describes for this destination. These 16 November arrival covers may have been forwarded (by land possibly) to Matagalpa after having been previously misdirected or they could conceivably have been arrival stamped on the 18th with a device that had not been reset for two days or had been changed backwards from the 17th. 16 November 1932 was a Wednesday, a day not designated for an air mail flight. These speculations about the cover depicted in figure 9 will require corroboration, hopefully as more covers or a more cogent explanation comes to light.

The eleven registered "Hammer" covers to Jinotega (one is depicted in figure 10) are all arrival stamped 25 November 1932 (also a scheduled Friday flight from Managua). These covers may have been overlooked in the Managua registration office on 18 November and may not have been sent until the flight to Jinotega on the following Friday, 25 November. Conversely, they may have been overlooked on 18 November in Jinotega since being registered they were theoretically maintained separately and more securely that was ordinary mail.

The registration numbers on the twenty-five "Hammer" covers examined give a feel for the way in which these were handled at the Managua registration office and give circumstantial evidence about the total number of "Hammer" covers prepared. The five covers to Matagalpa were numbered 70, 71, 72, 74 and 85; the six to Esteli were numbered 92, 112, 114, 117, 120 and 124; the eleven to Jinotega were numbered 125, 130-132, 140, 142 and 144-148; and the three to Ocotal were numbered 155, 160 and 171. Thus, the "Hammer" covers available for study were registered in groupings based on destination and spanned the registration numbers from 70 to 171 in a non-overlapping fashion. From this information, one might surmise that at least 101 of the 253 letters reported by Huber were Hammer's. This number is consistent with the fact that twenty-five out of the thirty-nine first flight covers examined for this study are Hammer's. It is also interesting that the two McPherson covers to Ocotal had registration numbers 17 and 18 and his cover to Esteli had registration number 59. He was a Marine and may have arrived earlier at the post office than Hammer did.

Clearly the preceding speculations about the most probable explanations for the evidence available about these "12 October" first interior air mail flights is open to challenge but I have tried to apply "Occam's razor" (the maxim that assumptions introduced to explain a thing must not be multiplied, i.e., the simplest explanation should be used).

The *Catalogue des Aerogrammes du Monde Entier*, published in 1950 by Frank Muller, lists the 12 October 1932 first flights from Managua to Ocotal, Esteli, Matagalpa and Jinotega and also lists return flights from these four towns to Managua on the same date. The actual situation was much more complex, but Müller and Huber both describe these "return" flights to Managua. I have neither seen nor heard of any cacheted first flight covers back to Managua and would welcome reports.

I have seen only one flight cover sent back to Managua during these weeks in October and November of 1932 and its status is problematical (figure 12).

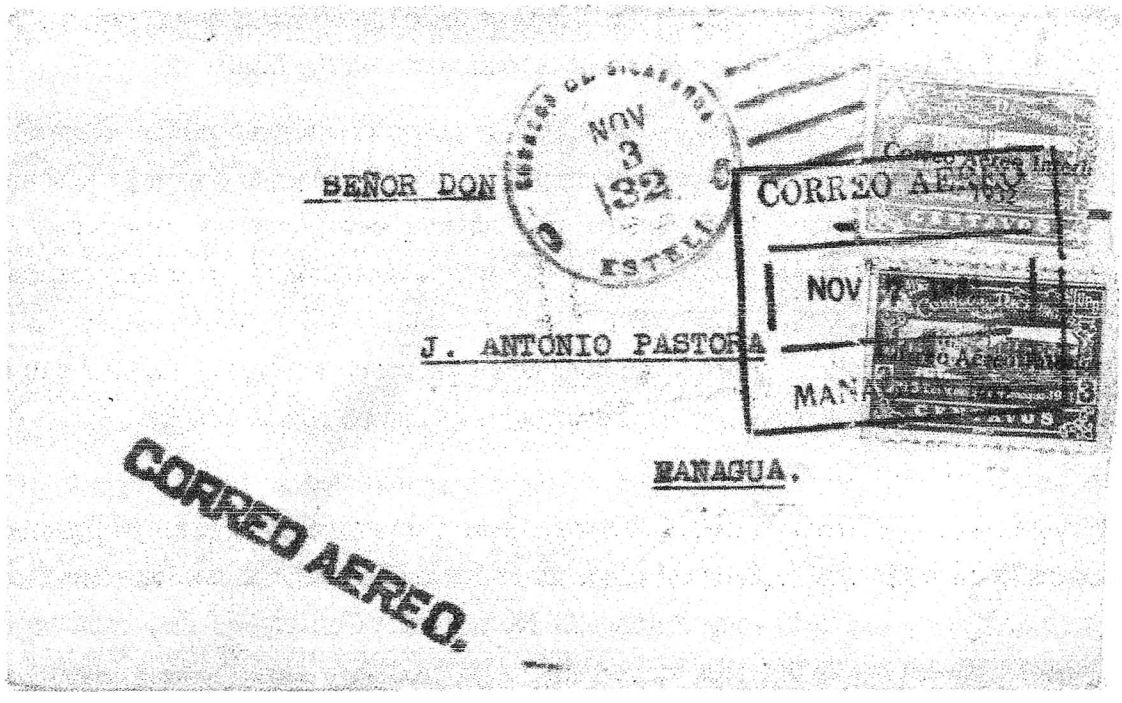


Figure 12. Flight cover from Esteli to Managua.
Front: Circular 3 November 1932 "Correo De Nicaragua / ESTELI" cancellation with bars *under* the top stamp.
Rectangular "CORREO AEREO / NOV 7 1932 / MANAGUA Nic-" arrival cancellation *over* the stamps.
Franked with SG 696 and 698. "CORREO AEREO" etiquette ink is the same colour as the Esteli cancellation.
Reverse: (Not shown) Identical rectangular Managua arrival cancellation.

The Esteli cancellation on the front seems correct with 3 November matching the scheduled Thursday flight back from Esteli to Managua. However, the stamps were applied *over* the Esteli cancellation bars and the rectangular "CORREO AEREO / NOV 7 1932 / MANAGUA Nic-" presumed arrival mark cancelled the stamps.

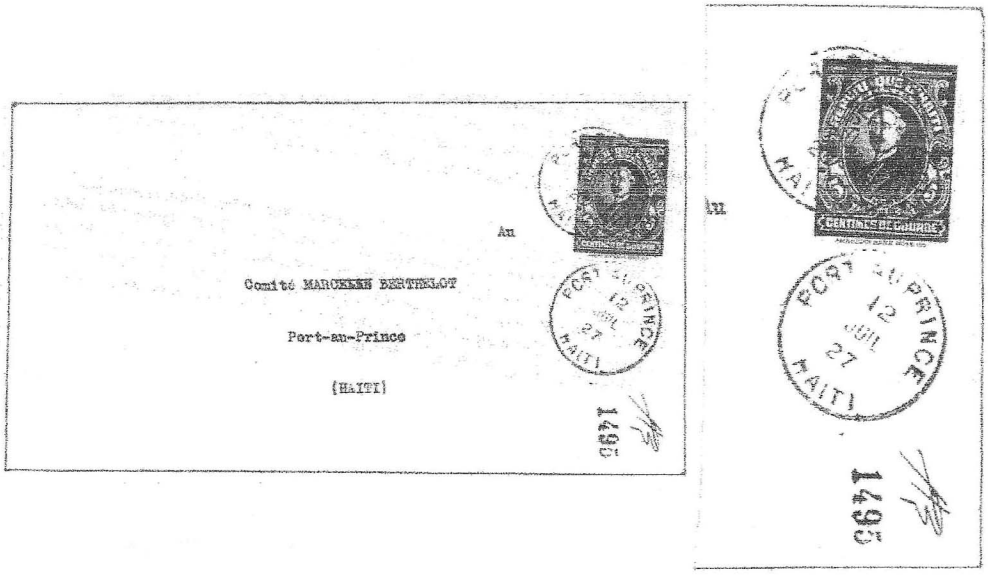
One possible explanation is that interior air mail stamps were not available in Esteli at this time. The "CORREO AEREO" instructional mark is the same purple-brown ink colour as the Esteli cancellation. When the cover is held up to a bright light, "08", 1 cm high can be seen written on the envelope under the top stamp. This is the correct interior rate and may have indicated cash payment in the absence of proper interior air mail stamps in Esteli.

Six of the thirty-nine covers available for study from the "12 October" first interior flight are franked only with official stamps and the senders are either well documented Nicaraguan postal officials (see figures 5, 8 and 9) or in the case of the cover depicted in figure 4, the envelope is official stationery. Dr John Allen has suggested that these six official covers and similar ones seen for other Nicaraguan flights are really test covers, prepared by postal authorities in order to monitor and document the airmail delivery performance of the contract airline. Gathering material evidence about compliance with the terms and conditions of these government contracts to carry air mail was one logical duty of the postal officials. Whether or not they subsequently benefited personally from the eventual distribution and sale of these official covers to the philatelic community does not really detract from the original intent and legitimate status of at least some of these as test covers.

WHAT WERE THE HAITIAN BERTHELOT STAMPS FOR?

by Dr RICHARD H SAUNDRY

At a recent local stamp fair I came across two covers, both sent locally in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in July 1927, bearing stamps that I thought might be of more than marginal interest. Knowing essentially nothing of the basic philately of Haiti I acquired both covers and am now asking if any of our readers can provide extra information about the stamps.



The two covers are each franked with single copies of the then currant 5 centimes stamp (SG 299; Scott 315) showing the portrait of President Louis J Borno. This stamp was the lowest value of the definitive set issued 3 September 1924, and presumably their use satisfied the local letter rate. The stamps on my covers were overprinted in red with what looks like a distended stomach surrounding the legend "12-7 BERTHELOT 1927". The text is difficult to see, even with the aid of a magnifying glass, because of a lack of contrast of red overprint on dark green stamp. Black on white photocopiers do not begin to do justice to the overprint.

There is no doubt I have two philatelically contrived commemorative covers. They bear serial numbers either "1495" or "1540" at bottom right hand corner of the envelope, and most significantly both were addressed to the "Comité MARCELIN BERTHELOT". The name Marcelin Berthelot rang a bell somewhere at the back of my mind and sure enough on consulting my French stamp catalogues I find France issued a 90 Centimes commemorative stamp 7 September 1927 (SG 457; Scott 242) commemorating the centenary of his birth. The more informative Scott catalogue tells me that Berthelot (1827-1907) was both a chemist and a statesman. I have a nagging suspicion that, having in a former existence professed to have been a research biochemist, I really ought to know how Berthelot distinguished himself as a chemist. No doubt when I do find out I will kick myself.

As these overprinted stamps do not appear in the major stamp catalogues I assume they were privately overprinted for use by the local Haitian Berthelot organizing committee. They are unlikely to have been officially promoted by the Haitian Post Office but were probably permitted for local use. Perhaps some of our more well informed readers will be able to enlighten us as to what was the function of the Comité Marcelin Berthelot?

THE LATEST REVENUE ISSUES FROM HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA

by ROGER ALLEN

I was able, during a recent trip to Central America, to obtain the latest issues of Timbres Fiscales from the two countries I visited. The details are given below.

HONDURAS

Fiscal Stamp, Type 1 (On sale in 1997) 1 Lempira green. Straight rouletted 7. Matt gum. Imprint reads "American Bank Note Company"

Fiscal Stamp, Type 2 (On sale in 2000 but have been in use several years). Values in Lempiras:- 1 light green, 2 brown, 5 black, 10 dark green, 20 blue black, 50 red, 100 orange, 200 dark violet, 500 deep purple, 1,000 yellow.

All perforated 13½, in sheets of 100 (10 x 10) with PVA type gum. There is no imprint either on the stamps or the sheet margins but the quality of the printing is such that they have almost certainly been printed outside Honduras.

Fiscal stamp, Type 1.

Fiscal stamp, Type 2.

Lawyer's stamp c1981 (50 centavos)

Other Fiscal Stamps of Honduras

Lawyers' stamps. Value 1 Lempira. Dark brown frame and yellow center. The design is a pair of scales against a map of Central America. Sheets of 100 and perforated 13½. PVA type gum. Purchased January 2000.

Lawyers' Stamp c1981 1 Lempira

Lawyers' Current Issue.

Engineers

The Latin Motto reads PAX ORBIS EX JURE (Peace to the World by Law). Interestingly enough, on a 50 centavos value of 1981, the Latin tag then reads NIHIL PRIUS FIDES (Nothing before Honour).

The colours of the 1 Lempira stamp have also changed over the years; in 1981 it was gold and magenta, in 1997 it was gold and dark violet. The 1997 stamp was rouletted 7, not perforated.

Engineers' Stamps — Value 1 Lempira. Dark blue, gold and red. Perforated 13½. The font and gum have altered over the years but the basic design has remained unchanged.

Accountants' Stamps, Type 1 — c1981. 1 Lempira. Red and green. Perforated 11. PVA type gum.

Accountants' Stamps, Type 2 — 1996. Green and black. Perforated 13. Sheets of 100 (10 x 10). Printers: Bulnes Impresores.

Accountants Stamp, Type 1

Accountants' Stamp, Type 2

Current Nicaraguan Fiscal

NICARAGUA

Fiscal Stamps on sale in 2000

Values in Cordobas: 1 red, 2 brown, 5 blue, 10 carmine, 25 orange, 50 green, 100 violet. Rouletted 4 x 8. Self adhesive on thin card backing.

This issue has been printed rather crudely by the National Security Printers, Managua. In previous years the same design was in use but the impression was much clearer and the sheets were rouletted 7 and ungummed

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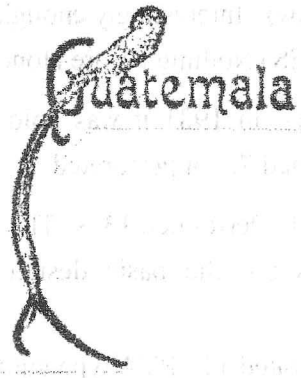
LETTER TO THE EDITOR from RICHARD YUDIN

I liked the piece on the Canal Zone but perhaps you need to clarify that the Panama Rail Road Company's steamships (yes, the steamships belonged to the railway which in turn belonged to the Canal) were not the only ones with US Seapost/R.P.O. cancels – Grace Line ships and Dollar line ships also carried official US Mail clerks. The Grace Line vessels were named after female saints, all beginning with "Santa" and are comparatively frequently offered. Entwistle also mentions that the Colombia Line and the Panama–Pacific Line also carried US Mail clerks, but I have not seen any of these covers.



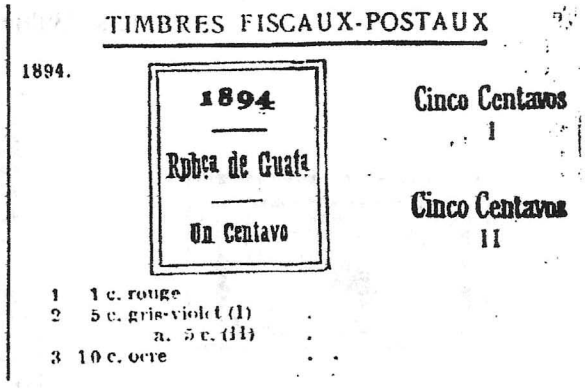
THE SO-CALLED POSTAL FISCAL STAMPS

by MARK SPYCHER

At the end of the Guatemala section these "stamps" are given catalogue status in the YVERT under the heading of "TIMBRES FISCAUX-POSTAUX".

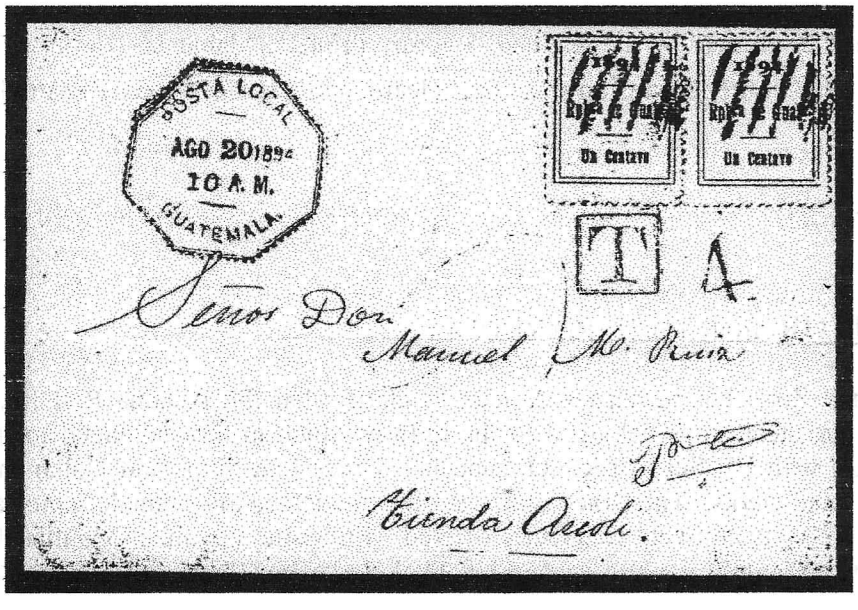
These "postal fiscal stamps", however, were never authorized for the purpose of franking mail and up to now the real purpose of their appearance is still in the dark.

Neither Stanley Gibbons nor Scott nor Michel mention them.



For many years these items had been offered at rather high prices until in the 1960s, hundreds, if not thousands, of sheets turned up in Guatemala originating from a huge Government archive. Why? Many hundred sheets were found by a member of the ISGC in a local fruit market where they were used for a very practical purpose – as wrappers for fruit and vegetables!

In order to finally put an end to the fairy-tale regarding these "postal fiscals" I am illustrating a very attractive mourning cover franked with a pair of 1 centavo. This is a sealed and locally used envelope (pte) and correctly franked with 2 centavos. Although the "stamps" were properly obliterated with a bar cancel the postal clerk wasn't fooled and the addressee was charged 4 centavos i.e. double the normal postage.



One can speculate as to whether the sender made use of these fiscals in the belief that their franking power was above board or whether he was trying to "pull a fast one".

Be this as it may the Post Office didn't fall for it.